11-SD-15-KP M17.2-M50.7
PM 10.7-31.8 (KP M18.3-51.2)
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WETLANDS FINDING

Pursuant to: Executive Order 11990 – Protection of Wetlands

The proposed project would impact United States Army Corps of Engineersjurisdictional wetlands at three locations in the I-15 Corridor. Following is a discussion of the impacts that are anticipated at each of the locations. In addition, Table 1A summarizes impacts to ACOE jurisdictional wetlands.

Preferred Alternative

Green Valley Creek

There are no permanent impacts to wetlands ACOE jurisdictional wetlands at Green Valley Creek. Approximately 0.36 hectare (0.89 acre) of temporary impacts to USACOE jurisdictional wetlands are anticipated. These impacts will result from demolition and reconstruction of the new bridge and the removal of the existing piers.

Los Penasquitos Creek

Los Peñasquitos Creek will have permanent impacts of about0.04 hectare (0.1 acre) of USACOE wetlands consisting of southern willow scrub and emergent wetland. Of that total, approximately 0.20 hectare (0.50 acre) are due to the addition of one pier required for widening the existing northbound structure.

San Clemente Creek

Temporary USACOE wetlands and waters impacts of less than 0.08 hectare (0.2 acre) will occur during construction at San Clemente Creek. These impacts are caused by the the temporary access needed to replace the existing culvert.

Table 1A: Wetland Impacts

Hectare/Acre

	Lake Hodges	Green Valley Creek	Los Penasquitos Creek	I-15/SR 56	San Clemente Creek
Temporary USACOE wetland impacts (hectares/acres)	0/0	0.36/0.89	0.20/0.50	0/0	0.08/0.2
Permanent USACOE wetland impacts (hectares/acres)	0/0	0/0	0.04/0.10	0/0	0/0

AVOIDANCE ALTERNATIVES:

No Build Alternative. The No Build alternative would not impact wetlands; however, it does not meet the identified transportation need. In addition, existing conditions would not be improved at Green Valley as described in the section below "Measures to Minimize Harm.

Transportation System Management Alternative. With this alternative no wetland resources would be impacted. Transportation System Management (TSM) element is an approach to solving transportation problems by improving the efficiency of the existing system. System capacity can be increased by encouraging greater ridesharing, designating HOV lanes, and by adjusting ramp meter timing. The Department promotes TSM programs; however, many of the improvements that are typically associated with the TSM alternative already exist within the corridor such as ramp metering and the HOV lanes. Any additional improvements would only result in temporary reductions in congestion and would not accommodate additional demand that will exist in 2020.. This alternative would not meet the project purpose and need.

1+1 HOV Configuration with Reversible Lanes. This variation proposed to add two lanes, one in each direction between SR-56 and SR-78, and would keep only the existing reversible lanes south of SR-56 in operation. It did not include direct access ramps because one HOV lane in each direction would be expected to be over capacity. Traffic analysis showed that excessive congestion would develop in both the northbound and southbound directions during peak commute times. The HOV lanes would become congested by the year 2006 and the buses would not be able to function as a rapid system. This alternative would have been within the existing median and would not have required wetland impacts. This alternative would not meet the project purpose and need.

ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM CONSIDERATION

Three Managed Lanes (2+1) Configuration. This alternative proposed three managed lanes in the median. It would have utilized a movable barrier to adjust the lane configurations. Two lanes would be permitted in the peak direction and one lane in the reverse-peak direction. A 3+0 configuration would have been available to handle emergencies or special events. Finally, it would be inadequate to handle traffic volumes in the southern section of the proposed project before 2015 and for the middle section of the proposed project by the year 2020. This alternative would not meet the project purpose and need. This alternative would not have a reduction from the impacts of the proposed project since outside widening of the facility would still be required to accommodate the addition of 3 lanes.

Extend existing Reversible Lanes. This alternative would have extended the existing two reversible lanes in the median from SR-56 to SR-78. Access to the facility would be restricted to selected interchanges that would have direct access ramps (DAR) in and out of the facility. It would provide some of the same traffic improvements as the 2+2 HOV Alternative (discussed in this Chapter) and the Three Managed Lane 2+1 configuration in the peak direction. This alternative would not meet the project purpose and need. This alternative would not have a reduction from the impacts of the proposed project since outside widening of the facility would still be required to accommodate the addition of 2 lanes.

2+2 HOV Alternative. This alternative proposed four HOV lanes, two in each direction from SR-163 to SR-78. The HOV lanes would be accessible from the median at locations spaced approximately 3.2 km to 4.8 km (2-3 miles) apart. It proposed to convert the existing reversible express lanes that extend from SR-163 to SR-56 to two HOV lanes. Utilizing this alternative, by the year 2020, during the AM peak traffic period, bottlenecks would occur at Miramar Road, Mira Mesa Boulevard, SR-56, Lake Hodges, and around Via Rancho Parkway. Traffic analysis showed that many interchanges in the corridor would be deficient in capacity. This would result in queues extending back onto the freeway by the year 2020. This alternative would not meet the project purpose and need. This alternative would not have a reduction from the impacts of the proposed project since outside widening of the facility would still be required to accommodate the addition of 4 lanes.

General Purpose (MIXED FLOW) LANES ALTERNATIVE. This alternative would add one, two or three general purpose (mixed flow) lanes in each direction. One variation in this alternative also converted the existing reversible lanes to general purpose lanes. This alternative would not construct the direct access ramps for use by HOV. Although this alternative (the three-lane variation) would provide some short-term congestion relief, congestion would return before 2015. This alternative would not meet the project purpose and need. This alternative would not have a reduction from the

impacts of the proposed project since outside widening of the facility would still be required to accommodate the addition of 2 to 6 additional lanes.

It should be noted that since the existing highway crosses numerous tributaries and drainages, wetland impacts are unavoidable with any project which would propose to widen the existing facility.

MEASURES TO MINIMIZE HARM

Green Valley Creek

At Green Valley Creek the original proposal was to retrofit and widen the existing bridge. This would have resulted in 0.24 hectare (0.6 acre) of permanent impacts due to the placement of an additional pier in the stream. It was determined that by demolishing the existing bridge and constructing a new one, permanent impacts would be eliminated. The new bridge design eliminates the need for piers which are currently within the stream. New piers would be placed completely outside the wetland area. During construction, the creek will be diverted through a pipe to avoid impacts to water quality which may be associated with the demolition of the existing bridge.

Los Penasquitos Creek

At Los Penasquitos Creek, a temporary bridge will be constructed across the creek to minimize construction impacts. It would be located completely outside of the wetland area and would span the creek. This bridge would avoid approximately 0.02 hectare (0.07 acre) that a standard creek crossing would have created. Additional impacts could have been avoided provided the existing bridge was replaced however, the cost of the bridge replacement was prohibitive since only outside widening was required at this location.

Additional Measures to Minimize Harm

- Any indirect impacts from construction including noise, light, vibration and exhaust will be avoided by the Department's Best Management Practices (BMP's) included in Section 3.17 of the initial study/environmental assessment.

- Environmentally Sensitive Areas (to be avoided) and Limited Use Areas (to be only used temporarily for specific purposes) would be designated on design plans to prohibit work from extending into sensitive areas. These areas will be monitored by the project biologist and temporarily fenced

during construction. ensuring disposal sites for excess dirt would be located in non-sensitive areas

- construction of two new bridges over Lake Hodges and Green Valley Creek instead of the original proposal to widen/retrofit the existing bridges which would impact a larger area near the columns underneath the bridges; and

- Temporarily fencing all ESAs during construction;

- on-site biological monitor during construction.

No properties to fully mitigate the project's wetland impacts were identified immediately adjacent to the I-15 corridor. Caltrans, however, is currently proposes to perform any required wetlands mitigation on City of San Diego property at Los Penasquitos Creek within the Los Penasquitos Canyon Preserve. This mitigation site is located approximately one mile west of Black Mountain Road within the north portion of the City of San Diego. It is also downstream of the I-15 crossing where project impacts to Los Penasquitos Creek would occur.

The proposed mitigation site is divided between the City of San Diego and County of San Diego property. The site for creation is situated within an approximate 14-acre assemblage of abandoned sewage treatment ponds that were constructed several decades ago to serve what is now the City of Poway. The mitigation site also includes a total of 0.875 acre of restoration areas (exotic species removal and follow-up native planting and seeding) within Los Penasquitos Creek floodplain adjacent to (south and southwest of) the abandoned sewage treatment ponds.

Any required mitigation will be coordinated with the resource agencies.

All impacts to wetland/waters areas identified were avoided to the maximum extent practicable.

FINDING

Based on the above consideration, it is determined that there is no practicable alternative to the proposed new construction in wetlands that the proposed action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands which may result from such use.